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Sustainability concerns pile up amid packaged meal protocols

By SOPHIA MCDERMOTT-HUGHES
Senior News Writer

This semester, the dining halls look very different. Instead of clattering metal cutlery and conveyor belts of dishes stacked for washing, students spent the first week back on campus stuffing compostable containers and leftovers into overflowing recycling bins outside. The bench outside Proctor, empty of the usual groups of students chatting and eating side by side, is now filled with stacked boxes, empty sandwich containers and soda cans. Now, a couple weeks into the semester, students discard their trash in dumpsters outside of each of the dining halls, careful to avoid the bees and wasps flitting in and out of the accumulated waste.

As an institution, Middlebury prides itself on its sustainability efforts, pointing to its Energy2028 plan and divestment efforts amongst other initiatives. However, during a global pandemic, sustainability has taken a backseat to employee and student health and safety. The college has had to make difficult decisions, such as sacrificing years of efforts toward sustainable waste management, according to Eva Fillion, the sustainability communication and outreach coordinator.

Following Middlebury and Vermont health guidelines, the dining halls have worked to eliminate the possibilities of surface transmission of Covid-19 between students and staff. Dining has replaced dishes, silverware and reusable to-go containers with compostable and recyclable single-use alternatives. In place of condiments, soda, cereal and milk dispensers, the dining hall now provides pre-packaged, single-serve alternatives.

The college is spending more than seven times as much on food packaging and flatware as in the past. In September alone, the cost was $60,141, as opposed to $8,361 for the same month last year. The college purchased 271,372 individually packaged foods for August and September, including 33,840 plastic water bottles and 37,000 ketchup packets.

Under normal circumstances, all waste collected at Middlebury goes to the Material Recovery Facility (MRF). There, staff sort through it, often physically opening and hand-sorting bags intended for recycling or compost. Before students were sent home last spring, Middlebury was diverting 69% of waste from the landfill, largely due to the efforts at the MRF, according to Supervisor of Waste Management Kimberly Bickham.

However, the MRF staff can no longer open bags of waste, which could contain tissues or other material possibly carrying the virus. Instead, they now only examine bags from the outside, throwing away anything that does not appear properly sorted. Bickham estimates that the diversion rate has now fallen below 30%.

"My staff works really hard to keep the diversion rate high, and we really pride ourselves on that," said Bickham. "It breaks my heart to be throwing stuff away. I absolutely hate it."

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VAN BARTH & SARAH FAGAN/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

VAN BARTH/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Smoke from the wildfires raging on the West Coast has made its way to the Northeast this week, leaving Vermont skies hazy and sunsets colorful.

OPINION

I was one of the two on-campus Covid-19 cases; here's what I want you to know

By ANONYMOUS

If you have recently taken a look at the Covid-19 Reporting Dashboard, you may have noticed that there are currently no active cases at Middlebury — this means that I am out. I was the second identified Covid-19 case at Middlebury.

I was hesitant to write this out of fear that it might reveal who I am; some may already know or have guesses based on rumors. After being released from isolation, however, the sight of maskless students and large gatherings urged me to share my experience — to take the risk and speak up. So, even though we are inundated with messages from the administration about campus safety, I hope this article comes across not as a rant but as a message from a concerned peer who wants to offer a different insight into the social, personal aspect of isolation and quarantine.

Besides dealing with the physical symptoms of fatigue, loss of taste and smell and joint pains, the biggest challenge I faced during quarantine was loneliness and anxiety. The irritating creaks of floorboards filled the vacant hallways of Munford while intrusive thoughts occupied my already confused mind.

What if I spread it to people? How do I tell my friends that they may have been exposed? What if they shun me even after I recover? Will I recover? How will people perceive me when I go back? Will they eventually find out? These questions only intensified my self-consciousness and anxiety — so much so that I would sometimes spend an entire day behind closed blinds to avoid being seen by students who pass by.

Even though I tend to enjoy solitude and seclusion, being separated from my friends that I'd been yearning to see and from the campus that I've been dreaming to walk on transformed my quarantine into a physically and emotionally taxing

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LOCAL

Bridges to reopen this week as construction concludes

By BECCA AMEN
Local Editor

The 10-week closures of Main Street and Merchants Row to through-traffic in downtown Middlebury will come to a long-awaited end this Friday, Sept. 18. These road closures, which coincide with the temporary shutdown of the town's rail line and diversion of its freight traffic, are the "high-water mark" in the five-year Middlebury Bridge and Rail Project, according to the project's community liaison, Jim Gish.

"The work in 2017, 2018, 2019 was all preparation work for this 10-week period," Gish said. "This is the critical turning point of the project this week — kind of heading toward the finish line, which will happen next spring with the landscaping of two new parks downtown, and that will be the formal end of the project next July."

One main purpose of the $71 million Bridge and Rail Project, which is managed by Vermont Agency

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BENJY RENTON/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Construction underway in Middlebury last spring. A 10-week bridge and road closure comes to an end this week, marking the final stages of the five-year Middlebury Bridge and Rail Project.

Seeing early success, NESCACs navigate on-campus life during Covid-19

By LILY JONES
Contributing Writer

While large universities around the country are becoming Covid-19 hotspots, the 11 schools in the NESCAC — which have far fewer students and are generally located in low-density areas — have kept their Covid-19 cases extremely low so far.

Middlebury College has only seen two total active cases, and both students have since recovered. All NESCAC schools except for Tufts University have had fewer than five positive cases. Tufts — which is over twice the size of the other NESCAC schools and is located in a major city — has had nine new positive tests in the last week, with a total of 26 Covid-19 cases.

In contrast, several large universities across the country have

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OVERLAPPING CRISES
Bill McKibben on social solidarity in a world after Covid-19

By NICOLE POLLACK
News Editor

As Phase One neared its highly anticipated end, the college concluded its campus quarantine programming last Friday with a remote lecture and Q&A by Scholar-in-Residence Bill McKibben. During the talk, titled "This Crisis and the Next One: What the Pandemic Suggests About the Century to Come," McKibben spoke about the relationship between environmental injustice and Covid-19 and the reasons he believes Vermont has been so successful in its battle against the pandemic.

Jim Ralph, professor of American history and culture, introduced McKibben. Following his talk, three underclassman student panelists — Tim Hua '23.5, Alicia Pane '23.5 and Daisy Liljegren '24 — opened the Q&A session with prepared questions.

Before diving into the future implications of the pandemic, McKibben began by speaking about its ramifications in the present moment. He emphasized the disproportionate severity of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on minority communities, even in predominantly white Vermont: one of the state's few bad outbreaks occurred in Winooski, a city with a large immigrant

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VAN BARTH/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

McKibben pictured at a Middlebury event in January 2019.

NEWS

School of Abenaki pilots first summer remotely

By CATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN

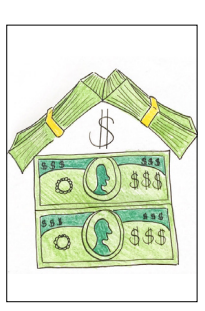
LOCAL

Independence with caveats: Students explore off-campus living during Covid-19

By CHARLOTTE CRUTCHLOW

Pandemic migration fuels Vermont real estate market

By JACK SUMMERSBY



ARTS & CULTURE

Direct Your Attention: An insider's look at America's outsider

By OWEN MASON-HILL

The sun doesn't set on climate justice: Sunrise Middlebury hosts summer study sessions

By EMMA CROCKFORD

Reel Critic: 'Boys State'

By NINA NG

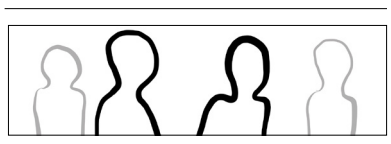
OPINION

A community plea to expand the arts

By EMILY KNAPP & ADRIAN KERESTER

MASK OFF, MIDD: Situationships are dead, long live intentional connections

By MARIA KAOURIS



How will we live together?

By BEN BEESE

SPORTS

Athlete of the Week: Jackson Hawkins '21.5

By NIAMH CARTY

Throwback Thursday: This day in 1988, Vigsnes's goal caps off solid weekend

By MICHAEL SEGEL